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PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHKV #2039/01 1460845
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 260845Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY KIEV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9517
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KIEV 002039

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#) [UP](#)

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: DEFENSE MINISTER GETS AHEAD OF FOREIGN
MINISTRY ON BELARUS

REF: A. KIEV 1937

[1](#)B. 05 KIEV 4699

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Sheila Gwaltney for reasons 1.4
(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a May 22 meeting with EUR DAS Kramer, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk said a meeting of the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus might be possible if Belarus were to make favorable decisions on issues of importance to Ukraine. Tarasyuk added that the Ukrainian government was preparing to accept into Ukrainian universities Belarusian students who had been expelled from university for political activities, and would host an informal meeting on Belarus in September. In a May 23 meeting with Kramer and Vice Presidential Deputy National Security Adviser Joseph Wood, Defense Minister Hrytsenko defended his decision to proceed with a May 26 meeting with Belarusian Defense Minister Maltsev. He said it was too late to cancel the meeting, and the Belarusian Ministry of Defense had played no role in suppressing political opposition in Belarus. Hrytsenko provided examples of the Ukrainian military's dependence on Belarus for critical supplies and maintenance. Kramer said the USG would not speak out against the meeting, but urged Hrytsenko to ensure that the Belarusian government did not exploit the fact of the meeting to suggest a rift had occurred between the U.S. and Ukraine with respect to Belarus. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) EUR DAS David Kramer met Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk May 22 to discuss a range of topics (septels), including Belarus. Second Territorial Department Director Anatoliy Ponomarenko and U.S.A.-Canada Desk Acting Chief Yuriy Nykytyuk sat in on the Ukrainian side. DCM and PolOff accompanied Kramer. On May 23, Kramer and Vice Presidential Deputy National Security Adviser Joseph Wood, accompanied by DATT and PolOff, discussed Belarus with Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko and his first assistant, Oleksiy Melnyk.

Tarasyuk: A continuing balancing act

[1](#)3. (C) When Kramer expressed appreciation for the decision not to have President Yushchenko meet with Belarusian President Lukashenka in connection with the 20th anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster, Tarasyuk said the Ukrainian government had taken into account the negative consequences of such a meeting but warned that a Ukraine-Belarus summit was not entirely off the agenda. Ukraine had important bilateral issues with Belarus at stake, such as formal demarcation of the Ukraine-Belarus border and the facilitated

passage of workers living in Slavutych across a strip of Belarusian territory to work at the decommissioned Chornobyl nuclear power station site. Tarasyuk noted that resolution of the two issues would be impossible without Lukashenka's personal approval. Tarasyuk also said Yushchenko's offer, made during the August 2005 Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit in Kazan, Russia, to have Ukraine act as a conduit of communication between Belarus and the European Union was also still on the table. Lukashenka had responded positively to the offer initially, but the Belarusians had not followed up.

14. (C) Tarasyuk averred that the Ukrainian government's generally critical stance toward Belarus would remain unchanged, despite domestic opposition not only from the Communist Party but also more importantly from Party of Regions and some of its partners that had not entered Parliament. Ukraine would continue its cooperation with the U.S. and EU, including by hosting the next informal meeting on Belarus in Kiev in September. The Ukrainian government was also modifying its requirements so as to allow Belarusian students, expelled from university for their political activity, to study in Ukraine.

15. (C) Tarasyuk and Ponomarenko were both surprised and concerned when DAS Kramer informed them about a press story that Ukrainian Defense Minister Andriy Hrytsenko would meet with his Belarusian counterpart May 26. They later told us separately that they had confirmed the information and relayed their reservations about the planned meeting to the Ministry of Defense.

Hrytsenko: Engagement, not isolation

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16. (C) On May 23, Kramer expressed concern to Hrytsenko that the meeting would take place notably soon after the Belarusian government's poor handling of the country's presidential race. The U.S. and EU continued with their strict policy of no engagement with senior Belarusian officials. Outside of Russia, in fact, Hrytsenko might be the first senior official of another country to meet with a Belarusian counterpart since the election. While Kramer said he understood that special circumstances might require Hrytsenko to go through with the meeting, he urged Hrytsenko to ensure that the meeting take place with the lowest profile possible. He suggested Hrytsenko request that his Belarusian counterpart, Colonel General Leonid Maltsev, provide assurances the Belarusian media would downplay the event and that Hrytsenko warn that the May 26 meeting would be the last between the two defense ministers if Maltsev did not honor his commitment.

17. (C) Hrytsenko said the meeting had been scheduled since the fall of 2005 and that he preferred not to pull out at the last minute, especially since there was no evidence the Belarusian Ministry of Defense had played any part in suppression of the democratic opposition in Belarus. (Note: Hrytsenko made this same argument during his May 18 meeting with Ambassador -- ref A.) Hrytsenko added that he was personally grateful that Maltsev, after their November 2005 meeting (ref B), had publicly stated that Ukraine's entry into NATO would not harm bilateral, military-to-military relations or technical cooperation between the two countries. The Ukrainian Defense Ministry had used the statement to counter Russia's claims to the contrary. The Belarusian statements were also an element of the Ukrainian government's public awareness campaign, which aimed to reassure the Ukrainian people that NATO membership would not negatively affect employment or the competitiveness of Ukraine's military-industrial complex.

18. (C) Hrytsenko noted that Maltsev could potentially provide a positive influence within Lukashenka's inner circle. He asked rhetorically, what was more productive in the case of

Belarus, Uzbekistan, and other countries -- isolation or engagement? Ukraine, under Kuchma, had been in danger of being isolated but continuing engagement with the West through the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program had laid the groundwork for the Orange Revolution. Had Ukraine been isolated, we would not be talking about a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) now, argued Hrytsenko. When Hrytsenko had spoken to then-NATO Secretary General Javier Solana about the Belarusian Defense Ministry's interest in improving interoperability with NATO and perhaps making a contribution to U.N. peacekeeping operations, however, Solana had been clear that NATO would not escalate Belarus' relationship with NATO to a Planning and Review Process (PARP).

¶9. (C) Hrytsenko stressed the need for good relations with the Belarusian military due to the two militaries' interdependence dating to the Soviet period. For example, he said, the Ukrainian military purchased "tens of millions" (either liters or possibly Ukrainian hryvnia) of jet fuel from Belarus. The only other source of the fuel had been a refinery in Russia that was now formally prohibited from selling its product for use by military, vice civilian, aircraft. If the Belarusian source for fuel were closed, Hrytsenko noted, the military fleet would be grounded, with attendant consequences for Ukraine's ability to meet its NATO commitments. Furthermore, the Ukrainian military sent its aircraft to a repair facility located in Minsk, and Ukrainian industry sold military aircraft to the Belarusian military. Hrytsenko said that, in addition to these particular examples, other cases of Ukrainian military and industrial reliance on Belarus could be cited.

¶10. (C) Kramer noted the U.S. had opposed a suggestion from some European NATO allies that Belarus be removed from PfP. He reiterated that Hrytsenko should take care that the Minsk propaganda machine not exploit the meeting of defense ministers to suggest that a rift had occurred between Ukraine and the United States. The USG had praised the Ukrainian decision not to hold a presidential summit, but Kramer said he understood that a defense ministerial was a different level. The USG had recently criticized an Interpol decision to hold a meeting in Minsk, but it would not speak out against the Hrytsenko-Maltsev meeting.

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¶11. (U) OVP DNSA Wood cleared this cable.

¶12. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Gwaltney